

TO THEE

Sermon by
Rev Wm H. Lyon
with Historical data

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The First Parish in Brookline

To Thee

"And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. And he saith, Master, say on." (Luke vii: 40.)

The Master often called the attention of those who were blaming others to their own faults. His figure of the mote and the beam has become a proverb. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican is like a cameo, small but clear. So, in this story, when Simon blames Jesus for allowing the sinful woman to express with tears and gifts her repentance and her reverence for him who had caused it, he points out to Simon how seriously he had failed in those duties to him as a host which were so necessary in Oriental life. "Simon," he said, when the self-righteous man stopped to take breath, "I have somewhat to say to *thee*." He called him, as he so often called others, back to personal fault and duty.

In primitive days there were only individuals. The savage lived in his own hut with his family and had little to do with other savages, except in the case of war. Civilization consists, to a large degree, in men's coming together and forming towns and nations. Then the individual, having formed his state, hunts, farms, keeps store or engages in manufacturing, and is liable to leave great questions to his public officers or legislative bodies. If he becomes dissatisfied, he talks in a vague way about "the degeneracy of the age," or "the absorption of the nation in money-making." It does not often occur to him that there is no such thing as a nation apart from the persons who compose it. Louis XIV said very grandly, "The State, it is myself." But here it is you and I and the whole voting list. If there is anything wrong it is because you and I and the rest of the voting list do it or allow it to be done.

There is no such thing as public spirit apart from the spirit that is in Simon and other persons. There is no place where the town keeps its political purity as there is a reservoir for its water. Material supplies may be stored in a place for times of need, but

moral qualities can exist only in the hearts and consciences of individuals.

It is the same with the efficiency of churches. There are no churches apart from the people who compose them. The church is not the Parish Committee any more than the town is the Selectmen. It is the people who compose the church. It is thou, Simon, and thou, John, and thou, Matthew. There is no such thing as a live church or a dead one, only a number of live men and women — or a number of dead ones — in respect to religion. The “tendency of the times,” the “influence of science,” the “abundance of literature,” or the “hardening influences of wealth” cannot get into the church except in the minds of thee and thee, any more than the fashions of today’s clothing can enter there, except upon the persons of thee and thee.

If, therefore, there is to be in any parish a hearty spirit of interest or coöperation or devoutness, it cannot be locked up in a safety-deposit vault with the church silver or placed in a bank with the treasurer’s balance. It lives only in the hearts of those who are the parish, and what we call the spirit of the church is simply the flowing together of the spirit that lives in the hearts of those who compose the church. The Holy Spirit, which is the source of all religious life, must make itself felt in the personal consciousness and be accepted there before it can have any effect upon the world. If public worship is sincere and hearty, it is not merely because there is a peculiar power in the influence of the church building to inspire devotion, but because the individual is capable of being so inspired, opens his heart to the influence and gives it welcome. Hymns, psalms and prayers begin to live only when they become the expression of personal piety.

Many will recall with me the sturdy figure that used to stand in the broad aisle, somewhat literally in it, and read the psalms and sing the hymns, especially when the tune was “Federal Street,” with real interest and vigor. This dear old friend was always there, and the whole congregation missed him, when he died, not only as

a person, but as a contagious power. The church bell always had somewhat to say to him of personal duty. It was not a mere sweet sound upon the morning air, but a call to his own opportunity and duty, and the whole service was more hearty for his personal answer to the call. He was well aware of "the tendencies of the times," but he was not in the habit of guiding his opinions or conduct by what other people in any region of human life thought or did, and he did not consider it here. His personal duty remained the same. The church bell rang "I have somewhat to say to thee," and he accepted the personal note and answered, "Master, say on."

We have lately said farewell also to a woman of rare loveliness of character who was well known to all by her sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of her church. The first remark that I remember having heard about her was by one who often had occasion to ask for help in charitable undertakings and who said that, while others refused or gave grudgingly, she always not only gave generously, but thanked the visitor for the opportunity to help. This parish owes its prosperity in very important ways to her open purse and still more to her open heart, her ready hand and her personal presence.

It is such men and women, living still with us or joined to the invisible company of those who have gone on before, who keep the world, and, among other things in the world, the churches, alive and happy. Ought not every one who wakes on Sunday morning and plans how the day shall be spent to say to himself that the responsibility for the vitality of the church does not rest upon general influences or conditions, but upon individuals? The success of the worship that day is to depend upon *him* among others. Even the sermon may kindle a livelier flame in the heart and conscience because the hearers are increased by one. It may be that the story of the feeding of the five thousand with only five loaves and two fishes was not so much an actual event as a parable. It takes less eloquence to inspire a large number of hearers than a small one. It is so wherever people gather to hear, whether for instruction, for

entertainment or for inspiration. Large numbers, however, are made up of individuals, and every one who comes counts. Be Simon rich or poor, well-known or a stranger, the congregation is larger, the spirit of the hour is brighter and every one is happier and more open to the influences of the time and place, because he is there.

But there is something to be said to Simon while he is outside of the church, too. The success of every religious society depends very much upon the character it bears in the community around it. This parish had the reputation, as I heard elsewhere before I came, and heard throughout the town after I came, of being very indifferent to the outside world. But parishes cannot be either indifferent or cordial. It is the individuals who make up the parish who are so. It is A, B, C, and the alphabet in general, who are not as friendly to strangers as they might be, and the only way to change the reputation of a parish as a body, though I am sure that it has been changed very much already, is for every person in it to take charge of his own heart.

We need not wait until the stranger is within our gates before we are cordial to him. We can give the welcome within *his* gates. Your neighbor has just come to your street. He has left a warm fellowship in Roxbury or Dorchester, and here he is out in the cold. Invite him to *your* church. Take the interest of your neighbor and of your church upon your personal conscience. Do not think of the church as a sort of loadstone, such as fable used to locate on a certain coast which drew the ships from all over the sea by a quiet, mysterious attraction. The church — it is *you*, — you the person, not the incorporated body known to the law, but you the individual. When I tell you that I have said the last words over to nearly a hundred and fifty members of our parish during my ministry, to say nothing of the breaking up of families by the death of the old folk, or the removal of families from the town, or of the young people who have married and settled elsewhere, you will see that the law of change, which replaces in your body and mine every particle in seven years, is at work upon institutions as upon in-

dividuals, and that institutions as well as individuals must replace what is lost by new supplies from without. This is a personal obligation of the individual.

There are other things that might be said to Simon, but there are limits to his willingness to answer, "Say on." So I am going to add a few words upon what the individual may do *for the future*.

Brookline has been very justly known as a wealthy town, that is, as a town which has numbered many very wealthy people among its inhabitants, who have brought the average possession per resident to a higher amount than any town in the country could show. These wealthy people, however, have not left very much evidence in the public institutions or monuments of the town to show that they were ever here. This is not due to any lack of generosity, for many is the charity, hospital, or college that owes them much, and the beauty of the town and the admirable way in which it is kept up are due to the large taxes which they have contributed to the general welfare. It is to be regretted, however, that the fine names, known far and wide already, should not have been recorded among the benefactors of the community.

This church and its parish house stand as witnesses to the generosity of those who have worshipped in them and the buildings which preceded them. It may show the increase in the *esprit de corps* of the parish for a generation to say that the building which was erected half a century before this one cost only about ten thousand dollars, of which about two thousand remained as a debt that caused grave anxiety, while this one cost at least twelve times as much and has no debt upon it.

Yet we have to own that the rapid increase of charitable and educational institutions has led to a decrease in personal gifts to the churches. In earlier days this parish received many such memorials from its members. Charles Heath, for instance, gave two thousand dollars for the aid of indigent persons, members of the parish being preferred. Benjamin Davis, who was for thirty-eight years the leader of the famous choir of thirty singers and

several instruments, left a fund of one thousand dollars for the music, the interest of which still goes toward the purchase of anthems and the like. Recently Mrs. Peder Olsen, dying after a remarkable illness, which was borne for many years by still more remarkable, indeed wonderful, fortitude and cheerfulness, gave to the parish the sum of two thousand dollars, under a condition which we trust will long remain unfulfilled. Besides these gifts of money there have come to us many pieces of communion plate and many articles of ornament and furniture which must be enumerated in a general list appended.

We may be sure that the list will grow still longer. Is it too much to hope, for instance, that in time we may see the fund given by Benjamin Davis very largely increased? Is there anything that can do more for the devotional spirit of a congregation than the music of a good choir? And could any of us look forward to a lovelier way of being remembered than in the anthems and hymns which such an endowment would secure whenever the congregation shall gather here? We are told that music awaits us in heaven. It would seem only fair to leave music on the earth.

There remains the opportunity to endow the church itself. A complete foundation is hardly to be expected and perhaps not to be desired. But a goodly income, which should lighten the burden of future generations, when, as we have already foreseen, a different class of people shall have crowded around this spot, — a goodly income would make the life of this parish much easier and more likely to be prolonged. Few among you know that this endowment has already been begun, in a very original as well as generous way, — that one of our oldest and most loyal families has endowed its pew, and left it to be occupied, rent-free, by its members or descendants until such time as no one of the line cares to use it. Then it becomes a free pew forever. Several such endowed pews would furnish an endowment for the parish to a very handsome amount, besides commemorating a donor or a family, not where the dead lie but where the living worship. In one of the towns of central Massa-

chusetts, where two or three wealthy families lived and were the main support of the old parish, founded two hundred and fifty years ago, the head of one of them—who had been, by the way, a governor of Massachusetts—proposed to his friends that the old institution should be endowed by them enough to put it out of danger. The old men have gone to their reward, but the old church still calls its worshippers together and still its door stands open to the village people. The endowment may not have been enough to pay the entire expense of the church, but it probably so reduced the rentals of its pews that people of small means need not on that account forego the privilege of worship and instruction. I am tempted to add in this connection a very generous thing done by a man and his wife, comparatively new among us, who took an entire pew in this church, though they had no children or kinsfolk to occupy the remaining seats, simply as a way of contributing to the support of the parish. There are others who are doing the same, old families, whose young folk have married, one by one, and gone to other homes and towns. In a way, this is an *endowment* of the parish while they live, and the donors should be classed among the benefactors of the parish. Perhaps they, too, may be inclined to make this endowment perpetual.

The Christian message has always been to the individual. As when the Master turned to the Pharisee and said, "Simon, I have something to say to thee," so the warning of conscience is always to the man first, and then, *through* him, to others and to the world. The accountability of every man to God is a Christian doctrine. We have done long ago with the dogma of imputed righteousness. The saints have laid up no superfluous virtues in a spiritual bank account for us to draw upon. At the Last Judgment and in every judgment which life passes upon us, the verdict is "Simon, I have somewhat to say to *thee*." And at the word all our circumstances and associations, our nearest friends and our dearest advantages, move away from us, and, standing alone, we answer, gladly or guiltily, "Master, say on."

WILLIAM H. LYON.

Gifts to the First Parish

\$1000 for Music	Benjamin Davis
\$2000 for Poor of Parish	Charles Heath
\$2000 after a death	Mrs. Peder Olsen
Annuity of \$50 after a death	Eugene F. Fay
Endowment of pew, No. 18	Charles H. Stearns

Communion Plate

Flagons	Edward Devotion, 1744 Miss Mary Allin, 1750 Mrs. Susanna Sharp, 1770
Cups	Mrs. Mary Woodward (2), 1770 William Hyslop (2), 1792 Prudence Heath (2), 1818 Mrs. Lucy Robinson, 1818 Deacon John Robinson, 1818 David Hyslop, 1805 (?)
Baptismal Basin	
The Old Bell	Hon. Stephen Higginson
Clock	James Leeds
Bibles	Thomas Walley David Hyslop
Windows	Mrs. William G. Weld Mrs. John Lowell Stephen G. Train Mrs. Frank E. Sweetser
Seven windows in chancel	Many Contributors Descendants of John Goddard
Bust of Dr. John Pierce	Mrs. Henry V. Poor
Silver Vase	Misses Stevenson
Brass Vase	Miss Emily B. Shepard
Glass Vase	Mrs. Peder Olsen
Memorial Tablets	Mrs. Theodore Lyman and sons Children of Edward Clark Cabot
Christening Font	Mrs. John Lowell
Bible Mark	Mrs. Peder Olsen
Tablet on Desk	W. C. Hunneman

In Parish House

Piano	Mrs. Edward Philbrick
Tablets	Sunday School
The Last Supper	Miss Charlotte Hedge
Pictures, Christ in the Temple	Mrs. Eliza M. Watson
Madonna, near door	Mr. W. S. Cutler
Madonna, over pulpit	Sunday School
The Prophets	Sunday School
Casts, Singing Boys,	Mrs. Eliza M. Watson
Madonna,	Mrs. W. H. Lyon
Oak Bookcase	Mrs. W. C. Hunneman
In vestibule and classrooms, En- gravings from Doré	Mrs. C. L. Wilson

In the Minister's Room

Desk of Rev. Joseph Jackson	Henry Lee
Portrait of Rev. Joseph Jackson	Miss E. S. Brown
Lamp	Parish Club
Prophets	Miss A. T. Lamb
Andirons	Sewing Circle

In the Parlor

Portrait of Dr. Hedge	Miss Charlotte A. and Mr. F. H. Hedge
Clock	Mrs. S. D. Bennett
	Miss Bennett
Basket	Mrs. C. F. Perkins
Brass Candlesticks	Mr. H. F. Bryant

In the Kitchen

Glass and China	Mr. Jerome Jones
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The list of contributors to the building of the present church cannot be found. The cost was \$88,000, including the organ. There were 172 donors to the Parish House Fund, most of whom increased their contributions after the fire for rebuilding in stone. The total cost was about \$35,000. To pay the debt of \$25,000 on the church in 1898, 115 persons contributed.

The cost of changing the chancel was \$1,357.98, of which Mrs. Henry Lee gave over one-half.

The cost of moving the organ and adding new stops was \$3,502, of which nearly one-half was given by Mrs. Henry Lee, Mrs. Louis Cabot and Mrs. Theodore Lyman.

The Parsonage was enlarged and improved in 1896, at an expense (to the Parish) of \$4,000.

Pierce Hall was bought by the Parish about 1895 for \$5,000.

Form of Bequest

"I give to the First Parish in Brookline, \$

For bequests giving money for special uses, legal advice had better be taken.

